

COMIC COLORS

INSPIRATIONAL COLOR PALETTES TO DISRUPT & INSPIRE

15 PALETTES • HISTORIC REFERENCES • BONUS TIPS

A SKUNKWORKS PROJECT BY

Retro Supply co

INTRODUCTION TO GUIDE

Comic books for most of history have been printed using a four-color system of cyan, magenta, yellow and black which served as a guide or “key” for the other three. Despite the limitation, colorists were able to get a rainbow of different options through expert color mixing. We’ve put together a collection of unique color palettes based on comics that span different decades and genres. Try using with ColorLab for authentic recreations, or let your imagination run wild to create exciting designs!



DICK TRACY

Detective comics often took a "film noir" cinematic approach. In terms of color this means dark, mysterious, and brooding color palettes. Here, Dick Tracy's iconic yellow get up is toned down to an ochre, complemented by a rich purple and rusty blood red.

HEX
C99251

RGB
201, 154, 91

CMYK
17, 42, 88, 1

HEX
60384B

RGB
96, 56, 75

CMYK
51, 82, 47, 35

HEX
9C4135

RGB
156, 65, 53

CMYK
24, 89, 89, 16



AMERICA'S FUNNIEST COMICS

In this cover illustration, the more saturated reds and browns pop against the large blue-grey background of the cinderblock wall. Using white against the the reds in this image keep them from sinking into the background, and also help avoid visual "buzzing."

HEX
688783

RGB
104, 135, 131

CMYK
62, 35, 46, 7

HEX
E8B86B

RGB
232, 184, 107

CMYK
0, 34, 49, 12

HEX
A57242

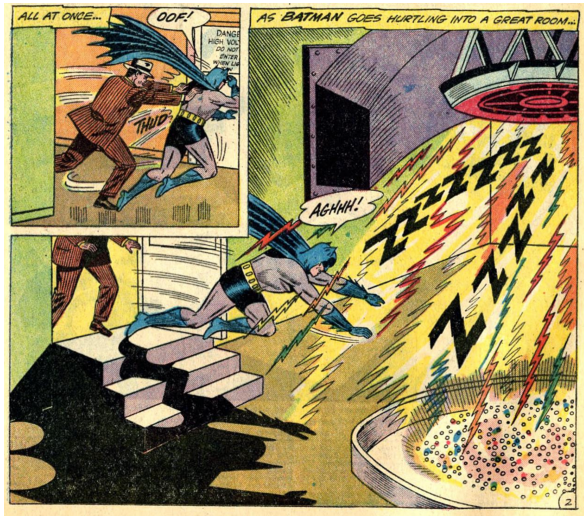
RGB
165, 114, 66

CMYK
0, 38, 67, 40

HEX
EF3B2E

RGB
239, 59, 46

CMYK
0, 91, 91, 0



DETECTIVE COMICS

We all know Batman's classic grey, blue, and yellow costume. However, due to the limitations of printing during that time, greys were hard to achieve and often came out looking more purple. Which works to the favor of this panel as it allows Batman to stand out against the warmer yellows and greens behind him.

HEX
588BAD

RGB
88, 139, 173

CMYK
73, 34, 18, 1

HEX
C3D283

RGB
195, 210, 131

CMYK
28, 4, 68, 0

HEX
625861

RGB
98, 88, 97

CMYK
60, 61, 47, 23

HEX
F2D965

RGB
242, 217, 101

CMYK
4, 11, 83, 0



DORAEMON

In this cover of a popular Japanese cartoon character, bright pink and deep red play off a subdued blue and yellow for an interesting take on a primary color scheme. Play around with blending them together to get the other colors in this design.

HEX
387BAB

RGB
56, 123, 168

CMYK
80, 45, 17, 1

HEX
ED669D

RGB
237, 102, 157

CMYK
1, 75, 6, 0

HEX
E0DC44

RGB
244, 220, 68

CMYK
15, 4, 88, 0

HEX
B22724

RGB
178, 39, 36

CMYK
21, 97, 100, 12



BETTY & VERONICA DOUBLE DIGEST

Like many comics, this panel makes heavy use of black to offset the cost of printing in full color. When first printed, this ink would have been full black. Over time, age and damage have dulled them to a soft grey, allowing blocks of color underneath to show through.

HEX
BC5D2E

RGB
188, 93, 46

CMYK
20, 73, 96, 8

HEX
72A3AA

RGB
114, 163, 170

CMYK
58, 24, 31, 0

HEX
BF8739

RGB
191, 135, 57

CMYK
23, 48, 92, 5

HEX
383939

RGB
56, 57, 57

CMYK
69, 62, 61, 53

PRO TIP
Think about whether you want your art to look freshly printed or aged when applying color. Old comics fade and yellow!



PLASTIC MAN

The primary colors (red, yellow, and blue) are balanced twice in this comic cover. Once with each other (no one of the primaries taking up more visual space than another) and again with the greens that make up the rest of the composition.

HEX
872752

RGB
135, 167, 82

CMYK
52, 18, 87, 2

HEX
018E9D

RGB
1, 142, 157

CMYK
83, 27, 35, 2

HEX
D7C255

RGB
215, 194, 85

CMYK
18, 18, 81, 0

HEX
E3223B

RGB
227, 34, 59

CMYK
5, 99, 81, 0V



SECOND HAND KISSES

This romance comic uses rich jewel tones to imbue the pages with passion. Use a dark blue for your lines to make your other colors pop. Notice how the woman on the left is covered in grey, while the woman in the middle wears a bright red to imply excitement and scandal!

HEX
276F77

RGB
39, 111, 119

CMYK
84, 42, 46, 14

HEX
031431

RGB
114, 163, 170

CMYK
96, 85, 48, 63

HEX
E7E487

RGB
231, 228, 135

CMYK
11, 3, 59, 0

HEX
D24928

RGB
218, 73, 40

CMYK
11, 87, 100, 0



THE VANDALS

This cautionary story about juvenile delinquents uses bold, clashing colors for the clothing The Vandals wear compared to the straight-laced browns and blacks of the policemen. This calls attention to them and provides a metaphor for them being out of the ordinary, especially against the dull backgrounds of the city.

HEX
D9523D

RGB
217, 82, 61

CMYK
12, 83, 84, 0

HEX
6C9669

RGB
108, 155, 105

CMYK
64, 25, 74, 0

HEX
E5793E

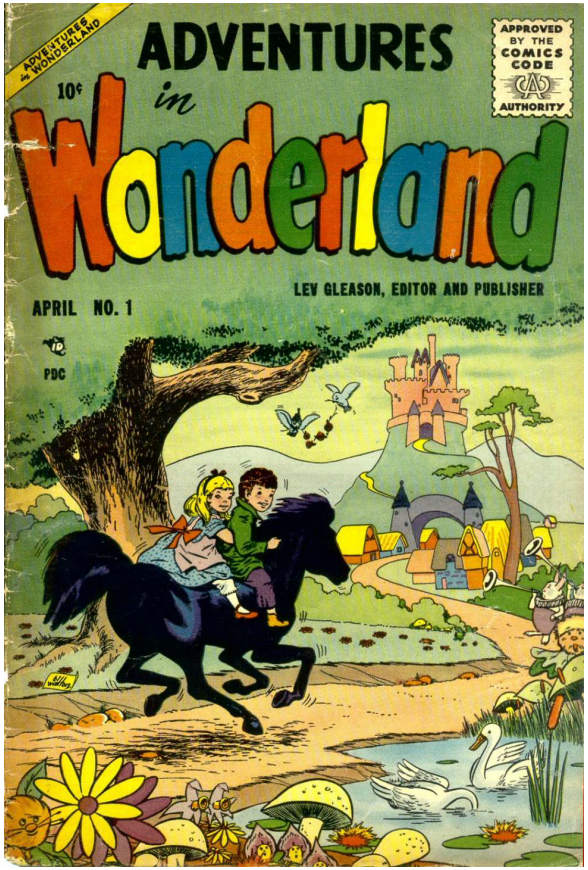
RGB
229, 121, 62

CMYK
7, 64, 86, 0

HEX
4A9097

RGB
74, 144, 151

CMYK
74, 31, 40, 0



ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

Bright primary colors are often utilized in childrens media. Because this is primarily a landscape, the illustration uses lots of greens and browns which allows rich reds, blues, and purples to stand out.

HEX
44732B

RGB
68, 115, 43

CMYK
36, 36, 37, 0

HEX
E24420

RGB
226, 68, 32

CMYK
6, 88, 100, 1

HEX
F7E758

RGB
247, 231, 88

CMYK
5, 3, 78, 0

HEX
2D6988

RGB
45, 105, 136

CMYK
85, 53, 31, 8



PLANET COMICS

Unique compared to other comics made in the Mid-Century, this cover takes a spin on traditional primaries in favor of mustard yellow, orange, and teal. The rich olive green makes a great accent color and addes to the otherworldliness of this space adventure.

HEX
056D6B

RGB
5, 109, 107

CMYK
89, 39, 55, 18

HEX
FA7200

RGB
250, 114, 07

CMYK
0, 69, 100, 0

HEX
F0A70E

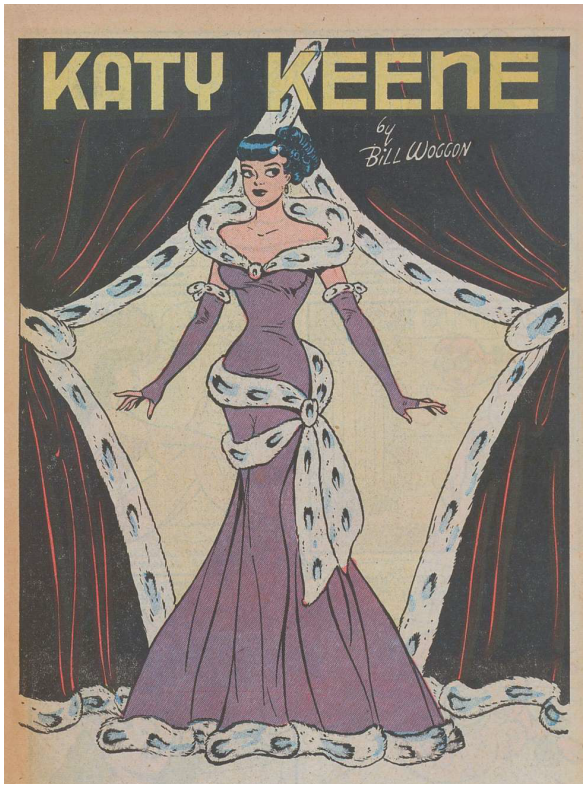
RGB
240, 167, 14

CMYK
5, 38, 100, 0

HEX
4D560A

RGB
77, 86, 10

CMYK
64, 46, 100, 38



KATY KEENE

Did you know that every wardrobe that was featured in this fashionista's closet was designed by a child? The soft mauve of this dress pops against the heavy blacks in this title image and the blue selected here serves as both a shadow and a highlight.

HEX
9483A9

RGB
148, 131, 169

CMYK
46, 50, 15, 0

HEX
D8B09E

RGB
216, 176, 158

CMYK
15, 32, 35, 0

HEX
6BA0C0

RGB
107, 160, 192

CMYK
59, 26, 14, 0

PRO TIP
To avoid misalignment, blocks of color were often bigger than what would show after black was added. You can see this in the red and yellow above.



THE BIG 3

The details in this full-page ad are seriously impressive, but it's the inviting focus on warm colors that caught our eye. Keeping the colors toned down would be perfect for autumnal designs. Experiment with boosting the saturation of one color for an exciting focal point.

HEX
D13F34

RGB
209, 36, 52

CMYK
12, 90, 89, 2

HEX
E59742

RGB
229, 151, 66

CMYK
8, 46, 85, 0

HEX
628E50

RGB
98, 142, 80

CMYK
66, 26, 86, 8



BAROOM!

Warm colors like the red in this panel can often be dominating when placed alongside cool colors like blue and purple. To maintain visual balance, use these colors sparingly as accents.

HEX
CCBAC5

RGB
204, 186, 197

CMYK
19, 25, 13, 0

HEX
D34435

RGB
211, 68, 53

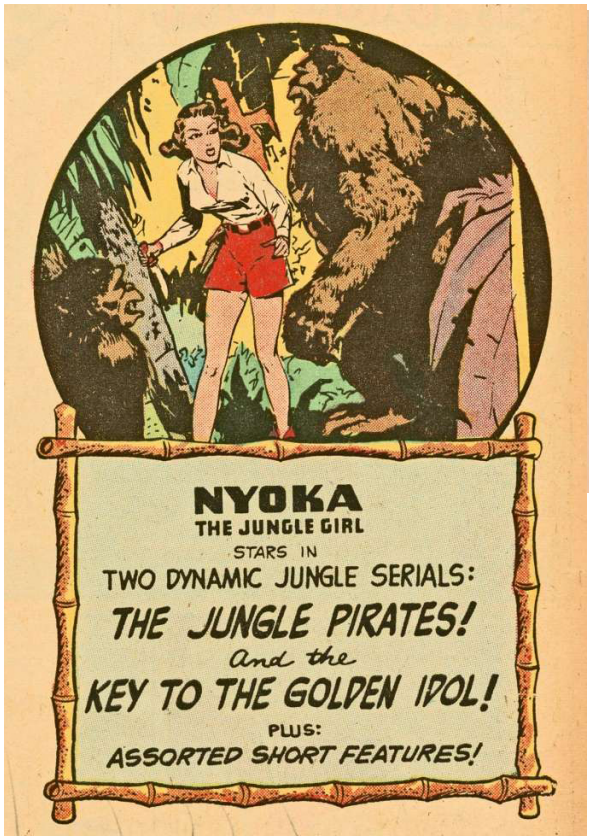
CMYK
12, 88, 89,2

HEX
A6D1D0

RGB
166, 209, 208

CMYK
35, 5, 18, 0

PRO TIP
Saturation also plays a role in visual balance. Keep the most saturated colors to a minimum.



NYOKA THE JUNGLE GIRL

In this spot illustration, the main character Nyoka blends into the natural greens, yellows, and browns of the jungle scene. The vibrant red of her shorts serves as a focal point directing our eyes right to her!

HEX
EF4123

RGB
239, 65, 35

CMYK
0, 90, 100, 0

HEX
ADD581

RGB
173, 213, 129

CMYK
35, 0, 65, 0

HEX
B37F41

RGB
179, 127, 65

CMYK
27, 50, 86, 8



AMAZING MAN

This exciting page of a lesser known super hero comic uses bold swatches of color and thick black lines to help keep things dynamic. Halftones are used sparingly on background elements to knock them back and create a sense of depth.

HEX
E06B2C

RGB
224, 107, 44

CMYK
9, 71, 96, 0

HEX
6AA279

RGB
106, 162, 121

CMYK
62, 18, 64, 2

HEX
4C7591

RGB
76, 117, 145

CMYK
75, 47, 30, 5

PRO TIP
As objects move further into the background they get lighter.